

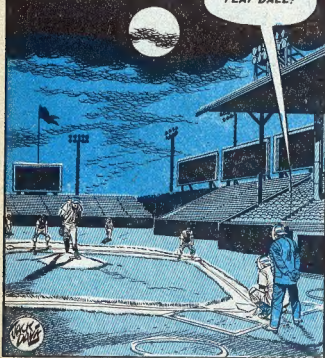
# THE CRYPT OF TERROR

HEH, HEH! AH... *SPRING* IS HERE, EH, FIENDS? IT'S *BASEBALL TIME* AGAIN. WELL, I'VE GOT A *BASEBALL HORROR YARN* THAT WILL DRIVE YOU *BATTY*. SO CREEP INTO THE *CRYPT OF TERROR*, SETTLE DOWN ON THAT *SACK*, AND YOUR *CRYPT-KEEPER* WILL *PITCH* YOU THE *BLOOD-CURDLING, SPINE-TINGLING, FEARFUL FUNGO-FABLE* I CALL...

## FOUL PLAY!

IT IS MIDNIGHT... THE EVE OF OPENING DAY. CENTRAL CITY'S BUSH-LEAGUE BALL PARK LIES IN DARKNESS. THERE IS A SMELL OF FRESHLY PAINTED SEATS AND RAILS AND HOT-DOG STANDS HANGING IN THE COOL NIGHT AIR. THE CHAMPIONSHIP PENNANT SAGS LIMPLY FROM THE NEW-WHITENED FLAGPOLE IN THE OUTFIELD, LIFTING SADLY NOW AND THEN TO FLAP IN THE SOFT BREEZE THAT SWEEPS IN AND ACROSS THE SILENT DESERTED GRANDSTANDS. BUT DOWN ON THE GREEN PLAYING FIELD, ILLUMINATED BY THE COLD MOONLIGHT, ARE FIGURES... FIGURES IN BASEBALL UNIFORMS... EACH IN ITS POSITION... WAITING... WAITING FOR THE WORDS...

PLAY BALL!



WHAT GOES ON, YOU ASK? WHY THIS MIDNIGHT GAME IN THE MOONLIT CENTRAL CITY BALL PARK? COME BACK WITH ME TO LAST SEASON... TO THE FINAL DAYS OF THIS BUSH-LEAGUE PENNANT RACE... TO A BRISK SEPTEMBER AFTERNOON. DRY BROWNEED LEAVES, CHASED BY A FALL WIND THAT CARRIED A PREVIEW OF WINTER WITH ITS CHILL, TUMBLED ACROSS *BAYVILLE'S* BALL PARK AS CENTRAL CITY'S STAR PITCHER STRODE TO THE PLATE...

C'MON, HERBIE! LET'S GET SOME *RUN-INSURANCE!*

GET ON *BASE*, HERBIE BOY!



IT WAS THE PLAYOFF GAME BETWEEN CENTRAL CITY AND BAYVILLE. THE TWO TEAMS HAD ENDED THE SEASON TIED FOR FIRST PLACE AND THIS GAME WOULD DECIDE THE PENNANT WINNER. VISITING CENTRAL CITY WAS LEADING THEIR BAYVILLE HOSTS BY ONE PRECIOUS RUN IN THE FIRST OF THE NINTH. THERE WERE TWO OUT AS HERBIE SATTEN CAME TO BAT...



BAYVILLE'S HURLER WOUND UP. BIG HERBIE WATCHED AS THE PITCH CAME STEAMING IN...



THE PITCH WAS INSIDE. HERBIE MOVED TOWARD IT, THEN TURNED AWAY. THE BALL STRUCK HIS ELBOW...



THE BAYVILLE TEAM CROWDED AROUND THE UMPIRE, PROTESTING HIS CALL...



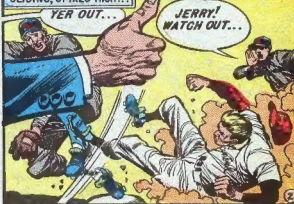
THE UMPIRE JUST SHOOK HIS HEAD. HIS DECISION STOOD. HERBIE TROTTED DOWN TO FIRST, AND CENTRAL CITY'S LEAD-OFF MAN CAME TO THE PLATE...



BAYVILLE'S PITCHER, PHIL BRADY, WOUND UP. SUDDENLY, HERBIE, ON FIRST, DID SOMETHING STRANGE FOR A BIG HULKING GUY. HE MADE A BREAK FOR SECOND BASE...



PHIL SPUN AROUND AND LET GO. JERRY DEEGAN, BAYVILLE'S SECOND BASEMAN AND STAR PLAYER, LEAGUE LEADER IN HITS AND HOME RUNS, WAS COVERING. THE PEG WAS WAY AHEAD OF HERBIE, BUT HERBIE CAME IN SLIDING, SPIKES HIGH...



JERRY DEEGAN WENT DOWN AS THE SPIKES SLASHED INTO HIS CALF, AND HE FELT THEIR BURNING METAL SHARPNESS. HIS TEAMMATES WERE RUNNING NOW...



JERRY GOT TO HIS FEET. HE LOOKED DOWN AT HIS TORN SWEAT SOX AND THE TINY TRICKLE OF SCARLET DOZING FROM THE SPIKE-WOUND...



THE BIG CENTRAL CITY PITCHER SMIRKED...

IT'S ALL IN THE GAME CHUM, IF N DEEGAN'D DROPPED THE BALL, I'D BE SAFE!

YOU WERE BEAT BY A MILE, AND YOU KNEW IT, SATTEN.



THE UMPIRES CALLED 'PLAY BALL' AND THE GAME RESUMED. CENTRAL CITY, STILL LEADING BY ONE RUN, TOOK TO THE FIELD. CENTRAL'S FIRST BASE COACH WALKED SATTEN TO THE MOUND...

I DIDN'T GIVE YOU NO STEAL SIGN, SATTEN! WHAT WAS THE IDEA?

MY IDEA, EDDIE! DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT! THE PENNANT'S AS GOOD AS OURS!



IN BAYVILLE'S DUGOUT, DOC WHITE CLEANED DEEGAN'S SPIKE WOUND AND TAPED IT...

IS HE OKAY, DOC?

SURE! JUST A SLIGHT CUT!

OKAY, BAYVILLE. LET'S GET A BATTER OUT HERE.



NOW IT WAS THE LAST OF THE NINTH. A HOME RUN WOULD TIE THE GAME FOR BAYVILLE, AND WITH ONE O.M. IT WOULD MEAN VICTORY AND THE PENNANT. AND JERRY DEEGAN WAS DUE TO BAT FOURTH. THE FIRST BATTER STRODE TO THE PLATE...



BUT AL GROUNDED SADLY TO SHORT. ONE OUT. THE SECOND BATTER MOVED INTO THE BOX...





BUT BILL POPPED OUT TO RIGHT. TWO OUT. THE THIRD BATTER STEPPED INTO THE BATTER'S BOX...



C'MON, MELVIN...

LET'S TAG ONE, MEL!

YOU DON'T LOOK SO GOOD, JERRY!

I'M... OKAY...

HULKING SATTEN WORKED... PUMPED... DELIVERED. MEL SWUNG AT THE FIRST PITCH LINING IT TO DEEP LEFT...



IT'S GOOD FOR TWO, MEL!

GET LEGS, MEL...

SLIDE, MEL...

THE CROWD ROARED. MEL PULLED UP AT SECOND. IN THE DUGOUT, BAYVILLE'S BOYS WERE ON THEIR FEET. ALL BUT JERRY DEEGAN...

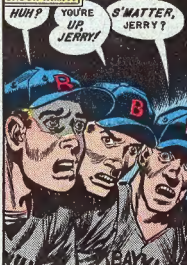


THIS IS IT! YOU'RE THROUGH, SATTEN...

LET'S GO, JERRY! HERE'S OUR CHANCE!

JERRY! YOU'RE UP!

JERRY'S EYES WERE GLASSY. BRADY SHOOK HIM...



HUH?

YOU'RE UP, JERRY!

S'MATTER, JERRY?

JERRY GOT TO HIS FEET... SLOWLY. THE DUGOUT STEPS REELED AS HE STUMBLED UP...



I'M... I'M OKAY! JUST... FELT A LITTLE... DIZZY...

BLAST ONE INTO THE BLEACHERS, JERRY!

JERRY MOVED TO THE BAT RACK... SLOWLY... PAINFULLY. HE SQUINTED HARD, SEARCHING...

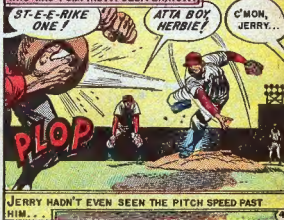


SOMETHING'S WRONG WITH HIM!

HE CAN'T EVEN FIND HIS BAT...

LET'S GO, BATTER...

FINALLY, FINDING HIS FAVORITE WOOD, JERRY MOVED INTO THE BATTER'S BOX. HE STARED OUT AT SATTEN WHO WAS PUMPING... DELIVERING...



ST-E-E-RIKE ONE!

ATTA BOY, HERBIE!

C'MON, JERRY...

JERRY HADN'T EVEN SEEN THE PITCH SPEED PAST HIM...

THE SECOND PITCH WAS SLOW, STRAIGHT DOWN THE MIDDLE... REAL HOME RUN MEAT. JERRY SEEMED TO SENSE IT AND SWUNG WILDLY...



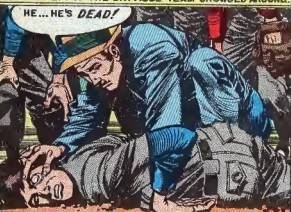
TO JERRY, IT WAS GETTING DARK. HE COULD HARDLY MAKE OUT SATTEN'S UNIFORM AS HE PUMPED THEN...



HE SLUMPED TO THE GROUND AS SATTEN'S PITCH WENT BY...



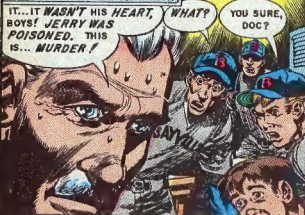
THE BALL GAME WAS OVER. CENTRAL CITY HAD WON THE CHAMPIONSHIP. DOC WHITE RUSHED TO DEEGAN'S SIDE AS THE REST OF THE BAYVILLE TEAM CROWDED AROUND.



THE PARK WAS EMPTY NOW. BAYVILLE'S BROKEN-HEARTED FANS HAD FILED SILENTLY OUT. IN THE DRESSING ROOM, JERRY DEEGAN'S BODY LAY ON THE RUB-DOWN TABLE. DOC WHITE BENT OVER HIM...



THEN, DOC WHITE'S FACE BLANCHED. HE GOT BUSY... WITH NEEDLES AND BOTTLES AND RUBBER TUBES. DEEGAN'S TEAMMATES WATCHED SILENTLY. FINALLY, THE DOC SPOKE. HIS VOICE WAS HUSKY... GRIM...



POSITIVE! HE DIED FROM A QUICK ACTING POISON WHICH, ONCE IT ENTERS YOUR BLOODSTREAM, KILLS YOU WITHIN FIFTEEN MINUTES!

BUT JERRY WAS OUT ON THE FIELD FIFTEEN MINUTES BEFORE HE DIED.

SURE! HE... HE... GOOD LORD!



FOR A MOMENT, IT WAS SO QUIET IN THE BAYVILLE DRESSING ROOM, YOU COULD HEAR A PIN DROP. THEN...

SATTEN! HERBIE SATTEN. HE KNEW THAT IF JERRY CAME UP IN THE NINTH, IT WOULD MEAN THE GAME!

THAT CRAZY MOVE! THAT STEAL! HE HAD NO CHANCE TO MAKE IT...



SATTEN SPIKED JERRY DELIBERATELY!

MURDERED HIM... WITH...

POISONED SPIKES!



THE VISITING TEAM LOCKER ROOM WAS DESERTED. CENTRAL CITY'S BOYS, INCLUDING SATTEN, HAD GONE. ONLY THE TRAINER WAS LEFT...EMPTYING THE LOCKERS, AND PACKING THE EQUIPMENT AWAY...

WHICH LOCKER'D HERBIE SATTEN USE, MOE?

THAT ONE. HIS STUFF'S STILL IN IT...



WHILE THE OTHER PLAYERS KEPT MOE, THE TRAINER, BUSY, DOC WHITE MADE A FAST CHECK ON SATTEN'S SPIKES. LATER, BACK AT THE BAYVILLE DRESSING ROOM...

THERE'S NO DOUBT ABOUT IT! SATTEN'S OUR MURDERER. TRACES OF THE POISON ARE STILL ON HIS SPIKES.

THIS IS A JOB FOR THE POLICE.

NO! WAIT! LET'S TAKE CARE OF HIM OURSELVES... OUR WAY...



YES, FIENDS. HERBIE SATTEN HAD SO WANTED TO WIN THE PENNANT, NOT FOR CENTRAL CITY BUT FOR HIS OWN FAT EGO, THAT AT THE BEGINNING OF THE NINTH, WHILE HIS TEAM WAS AT BAT, HE'D PAINTED HIS SPIKES WITH THE FAST-ACTING POISON. HE'D CARRIED THE POISON WITH HIM FOR JUST SUCH AN OCCASION. GETTING HIT WITH THE PITCH WAS EASY. THE SLIDE, EASIER, AND THE JOB WAS DONE. AND ALL LAST WINTER, HERBIE'D THOUGHT HE'D GOTTEN AWAY WITH IT. HE'D PITCHED HIS TEAM TO VICTORY AND THE PENNANT. HE'D BEEN DECLARED A HERO. SOON IT WOULD BE THE BIG-LEAGUES FOR HIM. SOON, HE'D BE FAMOUS. HE'D HAVE A NAME. A NAME IMMORTALIZED IN THE ANNALS OF BASEBALL. THAT'S WHY, ON THE DAY BEFORE OPENING DAY...



... WHEN THE LETTER ARRIVED, HE FELL FOR THE INVITATION...

DEAR MR. SATTEN, WE ARE A GROUP OF YOUR MOST AVID FOLLOWERS. IT IS OUR PLAN TO PLACE IN CENTRAL CITY BALL PARK A PLAQUE, CARRYING YOUR NAME, TO HONOR YOU AND YOUR ACHIEVEMENTS IN BASEBALL. PLEASE MEET US TONIGHT AT ELEVEN P.M. AT THE FIELD TO HELP DECIDE UPON WORDING AND PLACEMENT OF SAID TABLET. THE HERBERT SATTEN COMMEMORATION COMMITTEE



HERBIE WENT. WHY NOT? THIS WAS WHAT HE WANTED ABOVE ALL ELSE. THIS WAS WHAT HE'D MURDERED FOR. HONOR. PRESTIGE. AT 11:00P.M., HE WAS IN THE DESERTED BALL PARK, ON THE MOONLIT FIELD, WAITING

HELLO, HERBIE...

WHAT THE...? BRADY! DOC WHITE! THE BAYVILLE TEAM. WHAT'S THIS ALL ABOUT?

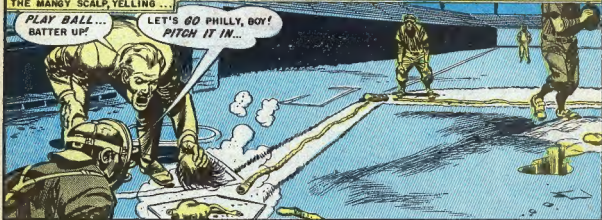




SO NOW YOU KNOW, FIENDS. NOW YOU KNOW WHY THERE IS A BALL GAME BEING PLAYED IN THE MOONLIGHT AT MIDNIGHT IN THE DESERTED CENTRAL CITY BALL PARK. LOOK CLOSELY. SEE THIS STRANGE BASEBALL GAME! SEE THE LONG STRINGS OF PULPY INTESTINES THAT MARK THE BASE LINES. SEE THE TWO LUNGS AND THE LIVER THAT INDICATE THE BASES...THE HEART THAT IS HOME PLATE. SEE DOC WHITE BEND AND WHISK THE HEART WITH THE MANGY SCALP, YELLING...

PLAY BALL...  
BATTER UP!

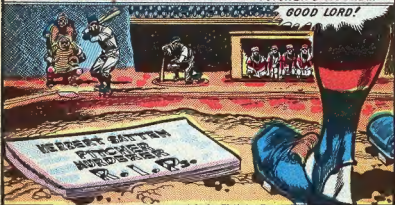
LET'S GO PHILLY, BOY!  
PITCH IT IN...



SEE THE BATTER COME TO THE PLATE SWINGING THE LEGS, THE ARMS, THEN THROWING ALL BUT ONE AWAY AND STANDING IN THE BOX WAITING FOR THE PITCHER TO HURL THE HEAD IN TO HIM. SEE THE CATCHER WITH THE TORSO STRAPPED ON AS A CHEST-PROTECTOR, THE INFELDERS WITH THEIR HAND-MITS, THE STOMACH-ROBIN-BAG, AND ALL THE OTHER PIECES OF EQUIPMENT THAT ONCE WAS CENTRAL CITY'S STAR PITCHER, HERBIE SATTEN...



AND IN THE MORNING, WATCH THE FACES OF THE FANS AS THEY PACK THE PARK AND SEE THE GREEN GRASS NOW STAINED RED, AND SEE THE HASTILY SUBSTITUTED PITCHER STEP TO THE RUBBER AND STARE DOWN AT THE STONE PLAQUE EMBEDDED THERE WITH THE ENGRAVED WORDS MEMORIALIZING THE GORY REMAINS BURIED BENEATH THE PITCHER'S MOUND...



HEH, HEH! SO THAT'S MY YELP-YARN FOR THIS ISSUE, KIDDIES. HERBIE, THE PITCHER, WENT TO PIECES THAT NIGHT AND WAS TAKEN OUT...OUT OF EXISTENCE, THAT IS! THE PLAQUE TURNED OUT TO BE HIS GRAVE STONE, AND THE PITCHER'S MOUND HIS GRAVE. OH, BY THE WAY, NEXT TIME YOU GO SEE CENTRAL CITY PLAY, BE CAREFUL WHERE YOU SIT. THAT NIGHT

ONE OF BAYVILLE'S BOYS HIT A HOMER, INTO THE STANDS. THEY NEVER FOUND THE...HEH, HEH... 'BALL!' 'BYE, NOW. WE'LL ALL SEE YOU NEXT IN MY MAG, TALES FROM THE CRYPT!

